

On Wednesday, May 14, 2008, the Subcommittee held an oversight hearing entitled, “Management of Civil Rights at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).”

Chairman Towns said:

“Discrimination in the delivery of services to minority and women farmers and the treatment of minority employees at USDA has been a longstanding problem – confirmed by official investigations and class-action settlements. What was once envisioned by President Lincoln as ‘the people’s department,’ many now call ‘the last plantation.’ For too long, we have heard from minority farmers and workers at USDA that they have been shut out of government loans and job promotions for decades because of the color of their skin.

In fact, these problems have persisted for so long that Congress took action to reorganize USDA to emphasize the importance of civil rights. The 2002 Farm Bill established the position of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights to provide overall leadership and coordination of all civil rights programs across the Department of Agriculture. Today, five years later, we examine whether that reform has been effective at eliminating discrimination at USDA. Unfortunately, the answer to that question appears to be ‘no.’”

Witness List

Panel I

Mr. John Boyd, President, National Black Farmers Association

Ms. Lesa Donnelly, Adviser for Women’s Issues, USDA Coalition of Minority Employees

Mr. Lupe Garcia, President, Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers of America, Inc.

Mr. Phil Givens, President, Phil Givens Company, representative of Native American farmers

Mr. Lawrence Lucas, President, USDA Coalition of Minority Employees

### Panel II

The Honorable Margo McKay, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Agriculture

The Honorable Phyllis Fong, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Ms. Lisa Shames, Director, Agriculture and Food Safety, U.S. Government Accountability Office

### Documents and Links

- [Testimony of John Boyd](#)
- [Tetsimony of Lupe Garcia](#)
- [Testimony of Phil Givens](#)
- [Testimony of Lawrence Lucas](#)
- [Testimony of Lesa Donnelly](#)
- [Testimony of Margo M. McKay](#)
- [Testimony of Phyllis K. Fong](#)
- [Testimony of Lisa Shames](#)